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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to examine perceptions of effective mentoring by both beginning and experienced teachers. Fourteen mentors and 15 beginners agreed to participate. Tape recorded interviews were conducted with each individual; questions related to: (1) the mentor's prior experience and the beginner's teacher preparation; (2) specific features of mentoring programs such as evaluation of beginners, training, incentives and rewards, specification of responsibilities, support by administration, physical proximity of beginners and mentors, and individualization of mentoring programs; (3) factors used in matching beginners and mentors such as age, gender, content area or grade, and general approach to teaching; and (4) possible benefits and problems of mentoring programs. Findings reveal the following common factors: the importance of matching beginners and mentors by grade level or content area; the role of mentor as someone who provides the beginner with support and encouragement; the role of mentor as someone who assists the beginner to fit into the school setting; and the accessibility of the mentor to the beginner in terms of time and physical proximity. (LL)

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Beginning Teachers' and Mentors' Perceptions of Effective Mentoring Programs

(Draft)

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Background

Assistance Programs for Beginning Teachers

Since the early 1970s, attention paid to programs of assistance for beginning teachers has grown from tokenism to the wide-spread implementation of programs, often in response to state mandates. Major reports for the reform of teacher education and the professionalization of teaching call for various forms of assistance for beginning teachers (e.g., National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1985; Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; The Holmes Group, 1986; Sikula, 1986). During the 1990s beginning teacher assistance programs will continue to strive for reducing the high attrition rate among beginning teachers and, more importantly, for helping them to put into practice more quickly the effective teaching techniques and instructional approaches which they have acquired during their pre-service education and clinical experiences.

The central feature of most programs for beginning teachers is a mentoring program which pairs a beginning teacher with an experienced teacher referred to as a mentor, support teacher, coach, buddy teacher, etc. While this mentoring relationship may take different forms (Howey & Zimpher, 1988), recommendations for selecting and matching mentors and beginning teachers reveal many common factors, including age, gender, type of work assignment, physical location in a school building, and shared teaching styles and ideologies. Descriptions of incentives drawing experienced teachers to mentoring include intrinsic rewards (e.g., sharing ideas, learning new instructional techniques) and extrinsic rewards (e.g. extra pay or tuition vouchers). Benefits for the beginning teacher include enhanced job satisfaction, improvement of teaching performance, and promotion of personal and professional well-being. These elements of mentoring programs are described most recently in Bey and Holmes (1990) and Huling-Austin (1990).

However, even as mentoring programs are proliferating, scholars have begun to raise important issues. For example, considerable debate exists over including as an appropriate mentor role, the evaluation of the beginner. Some scholars also question whether formally arranged mentoring programs can be expected to produce the desired outcomes in light of key features of teaching as an occupation conducted within the structure of schools (Schlechty & Whitford, 1989; Little, 1990).

Background to this Study

In the mid-1980s the state legislation of a centrally located state passed a comprehensive educational reform act. (Note: In order to protect their identity, the participants in this report are referred to only by number, and the information provided about them and their school districts is presented in generalized format.) One provision of this act required all school districts to establish a mentoring program and to pair

beginning teachers, school counselors, and school librarians with a mentor during their first year of employment. "Beginning" is defined to include experienced teachers, counselors, and librarians who are new to a district or who are re-entering the workplace after several years' absence, in addition to those who are starting their first job as a teacher, counselor, or librarian. Furthermore, qualification for a license beyond the initial license requires verification of participation in a mentoring program.

Although the reform act orders each school district to establish a mentoring program for beginning employees, little funding is provided to districts to cover associated costs, nor is much direction given to districts in formulating program goals, design, implementation, or evaluation. The reform act called for school districts to pilot a mentoring program during 1988-1989 and to have a program in place by the beginning of the 1989-1990 school year.

Participants and Study Design

Participants

I obtained names and addresses of 71 beginning teachers, counselors, and librarians, and 61 employees serving as mentors to beginners, from three school districts in the state. Each of these persons participated in a mentoring program during 1989-1990. Harrison School District is an urban district, Pierce School District is a suburban district, and Fillmore is a rural district. Selected characteristics of these districts based on the most recent state information is provided in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

In response to a letter of inquiry sent to each of the mentors or beginners in early May, 14 mentors (23%) and 15 beginners (21%) agreed to be interviewed. More specific information about the response rate of potential participants is provided in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

The participants in this study include 13 mentor teachers and one mentor school counselor, and 13 beginning teachers and two beginning librarians. They are predominantly female and white, although they differ considerable in age, teaching experience, and school level. Additional characteristics of the participants are provided in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Insert Table 3 about here

Insert Table 4 about here

Insert Table 5 about here

Data Collection

Between May 29 and June 14, 1990, I interviewed each of the 29 people who agreed to participate in this study. Twenty-six of the 29 interviews were tape-recorded. These interviews ranged from 16 to 51 minutes in length, and averaged 29 minutes for both the beginners and the mentors. I added other comments (e.g., the degree to which the participant seemed comfortable during the interview) at the end of the interview tapes. Three participants (two mentors and one beginner) preferred that I not tape-record their interviews. In these cases I took notes during the interviews which I later expanded orally using a tape-recorder. Verbatim transcriptions of the tape-recordings totalling 455 pages (at 55 40-character lines per page) were prepared for use on a computer.

The interviews were semi-structured. The schedule included questions related to (1) the mentor's prior experience in formal and informal mentoring situations or the beginner's teacher preparation program and work schedule, (2) effective mentoring programs in general, (3) specific features of mentoring programs (evaluation of beginners by mentors, training of mentors, incentive and rewards for mentors, specification of responsibilities, support of administration, sharing of preparation and lunch periods by beginners and mentors, physical proximity of beginners and mentors, and individualization of mentoring programs, (4) factors used in matching beginners and mentors (age, gender, content area or grade, and general approach to teaching), and (5) possible benefits and problems of mentoring programs.

Data Analysis

The verbatim transcriptions of the interviews were read three times for emergent categories of information, following procedures described by Lofland and Lofland (1984) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). Preliminary categories were expanded or collapsed, and criteria for inclusion of data in categories were established. This process resulted in seven major categories, each of which contained two or more sub-categories (mentor characteristics [2 sub-categories], mentor roles [9], matching factors [6], features of formal mentoring programs [7], benefits of mentor programs [9], and potential problems of mentor programs

[3]. I used The Ethnograph (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988), a computer program, to facilitate the mechanical process of coding transcriptions, and the sorting and retrieval of coded segments.

Perceptions of Effective Mentoring Programs

During the interviews, I asked the participants to share their thoughts on critical elements of mentoring programs in two ways. First, I asked them to describe things that they would associate with an effective mentoring program and to indicate which of those things they consider to be especially important. Following these open-ended questions, I presented them with several factors associated with mentoring programs for their reactions. In discussing these topics, the participants consistently referred to their own experiences in mentoring programs.

There were few features of mentoring programs which all the participants cited as important to program effectiveness. However, patterns emerged which are noteworthy. These patterns focus on (1) the matching beginners and mentors by grade level or content area, (2) the role of mentor as someone who provides the beginner with support and encouragement, (3) the role of mentor as someone who assists the beginner to fit into the school setting, and (4) the accessibility of the mentor to the beginner in terms of time and physical proximity.

Matching Beginners and Mentors by Grade Level or Content Area

In general, the most frequently cited factor associated by the participants with an effective mentoring program is the matching of beginners and mentors by grade level or content area. Referring to her own experiences, M-08 says, "There would not have been any way she [M-08's beginner] would have listened to any suggestions I made if we were not teaching the same grade level. I really believe that." M-12 says that there are serious problems if the mentor does not have experience teaching at the beginner's grade level. She says, "I would not offer, and I hope [I] would not be asked to mentor someone who was going to be a 6th grade teacher, because I've never taught 6th grade." The participants who are beginners also feel that very similar work assignments are essential if the mentor is to be of benefit to the beginner. B-06 suggests that a difference of only two grades may be a significant obstacle: "Teaching the same grade, I think, is very important. In fact, I taught 4th [grade], and this lady [B-06's mentor] taught 6th grade, and we just didn't share that much." Similarly, B-09 doubts that a kindergarten teacher would even be able to recognize the needs of a 5th or 6th grade teacher.

Other participants believe that it is less important that a beginner and mentor teach the same grade. M-11, for instance, believes the match should be between beginners and mentors who teach lower elementary grades (1-3) or upper elementary grades (4-6), but that "it was less important that they were both

exactly the same grade." Similarly, M-01 believes that a mentor needs to be "reasonably familiar with either the subject area or the grade level [emphasis added]" of the beginner, and B-12 suggests that "It's always nice to have another teacher or mentor on that [beginner's] grade level so that you can talk about textbook things and talk about student ability at that level. It all helps [emphasis added]." M-14 argues that mentors, ideally, should be able to teach well at several different grade levels: "Hopefully a person who is a mentor is a person who would be able to be a good teacher [and who could] go in and teach any grade. They may have preferences but they could be a good teacher at any grade level."

The participants working in high schools are especially vocal in suggesting that mentors must have experiences that relate directly to their beginners' work assignment. B-07 feels that it is "essential" that a mentor for a beginning music teacher is also a music teacher. As a Vocational Agriculture teacher, M-10 believes there are very few people for whom he can fit as a good mentor simply because there are not many teachers in that area. B-10, a Vocational Home Economics teacher whose mentor does not teach in the same content area, feels it would have been more beneficial for her to have worked with a mentor in her same area, even if that mentor taught in a different school district. In addition, B-10 and B-11 (who also is a Vocational Home Economics teacher) refer to state and federal funding and grant procedures as a uniquely important reason for pairing beginners in vocational areas with mentors who are also vocational instructors. B-10 says, "My problem is that I'm vocational; therefore, we have a lot of different state regulations that we have to follow and abide by and it's hard to find a mentor that is knowledgeable in those areas." B-11 states a similar concern:

> I don't know about other areas, but as far as Vocational Home Ec, my gosh, you've got to have somebody that knows what else goes on, because we meet different guidelines than the average teacher in the building. There're reports that we have to fill out and send across town. . . . We have to meet State Department guidelines that the English, Math, Science [teachers] don't have to worry about.

M-02 and B-03 believe that successful mentoring at a high school level not only requires that mentors be in the same content area as their beginners, but that they also teach the same specific courses. B-03 says, "I think they [mentor and beginner] should teach the same subject. My mentor had never taught English I or II. He didn't know what it was like to be in a classroom with freshmen." She goes on to say that without knowledge of the specific courses she was teaching, there was nothing that her mentor could do to assist her.

The two beginning librarians and the counselor mentor express other reasons for matching beginners with mentors in their same field. B-13, a beginning elementary school librarian who is paired up with someone familiar with library work but not

with a classroom teacher, says that if her only mentor had been a classroom teacher, "That would not have benefitted me at all. In fact, it would have been a great handicap." In addition, B-13 and B-02 (who is also a beginning elementary school librarian) suggest that beginning librarians require two mentors, one mentor an experienced librarian and the other should be a classroom teacher. Finally, M-06, a elementary school counselor, believes that beginning counselors who work in multiple schools (different from the schools in which their mentors work) should at least be paired up with mentor counselors who work in schools that are similar in socio-economic status.

Primary Roles of Mentors

Support and Encouragement.

The participants often describe the most important role of the mentor as that of provider of support and encouragement for the beginner. The ability and willingness of prospective mentors to fulfill this role can enter into the selection of mentors, as evident in M-01's recollection of being asked to serve as a mentor: "They said, 'Would you be her mentor?' And I said, 'Well, what do I do?' And they said, 'Well, you're just there if she needs you.'" Frequently, the mentor's role as provider of support and encouragement is likened to that of a friend. "I don't think the job [of mentoring] is that big," says B-06. "In essence, it's more like being like a good friend." B-03 reflects, "It's nice to have someone that's not there scripting and using all those terms and stuff. They're just a friend." At the same time, M-12 suggests that friendship may be too limiting a role for the mentor. Reflecting on the importance of the support of building and central office administrators for a mentoring program, M-12 comments, "Without it, you're a friend, I guess." M-03 also argues that effective training for mentors is essential if mentoring is to be more than "'Tell me your problems over a cup of coffee.'"

Occasionally, the participants compare the relationship between mentor and beginner to other types of interpersonal relationships. M-04 likens the mentor-beginner relationship to "a mother-daughter situation," and B-13 suggests that "Some people have a natural instinct [for working as a mentor], [just as] some people are naturally good mothers." M-08 reports viewing her beginner like one of her pupils: "I was truly worried about her, I really was. I took her on as I would take on the children, and felt that kind of responsibility with her." B-05 compares the "personality conflicts" that can arise between mentor and beginner to those between husband and wife. On the other hand, B-09 views the mentor-beginner relationship as a professional one. "I don't think you have to be the best of fiends," B-09 says, "but on a professional level I think that it's valuable to have two people that could work together." Interestingly, some of the participants suggest that mentoring a beginning teacher is much like serving as a cooperating teacher for a student teacher. For example, M-02 says:

If I were asked to be a mentor teacher I wouldn't do it

> because there was going to be any reward. I would do it because I like working with beginning teachers. I like working with student teachers. That to me is exciting.

M-03 also believes that it is dangerous to assume that a successful teacher will necessarily be an effective mentor. She says:

> Let's be honest. There are some successful teachers that [think], "I am going to be successful and you're not, because I have these wonderful secrets [that] I'm never going to tell." So a lot of it [selection of mentors] has got to be an assessment of the mentor who as a person would be more than happy to say, "This is what I've done. This is what works," or "I did that too and failed miserably."

Some participants also believe that prospective mentors cannot be "trained" to be caring and supportive. B-09 says, "I think you can teach anybody to go by a book, but I don't think you can teach somebody to be a compassionate, understanding person." In fact, B-03 believes that mentor training can be counter-productive:

> I'm not sure that you could train someone to do what good mentors do, which is just support and give help and . . . I mean, sometimes training does the opposite of what it's supposed to do. You know all the theories and you're not sure how to put them into effect.

In general, the participants believe that the central function of an effective mentor is to provide the beginner with support. M-09 believes that effective mentors "try to keep them [beginners] from having so many failures." B-01 describes the chief benefit of a good mentoring program as providing beginners with "a support system or a support person. That is just extremely beneficial. I mean, to have somebody to turn to in any situation is good." M-01 believes that good mentors prevent beginners from feeling that they are "just foundering in the dark." M-03 elevates the supporting role of a mentor to an even higher level:

> For the beginner, of course, I just think it's the feeling that they are not drowning, that there really is, maybe not a life preserver as much as a tree that they can hold [on] to that's above the water, a piece of solid ground that they can somehow use to get their footing to plunge back in.

From B-13's perspective, the mentor is "someone you can trust, someone who's not critical, and someone who is definitely on your side," and someone who helps a beginner to see the light at the end of the tunnel. B-13 comments, "You have to have someone to identify with you, to empathize with you, to offer possible solutions, to give you moral support and someone [who] could also remind you that, 'Yes, the first year is always rough. Hang in there. You will survive.'" B-12 also looks to a mentor to provide positive feedback when it is not forthcoming from other sources. She comments:

> It's always nice to have someone tell you the things that you do that are good. I heard a lot of, not so much things

> that were bad, just I heard the things that were bad and I did not hear the things that were good, from my principal.

As providers of supporter and encouragement, mentors also influence their beginners' understanding of their work. For example, B-07 observes, "I felt I could share things with him [B-07's mentor], another adult who knew my job." In offering support to beginners, mentors influence their norms of professional behavior and expectations. "In terms of a mentor," comments B-01, "I know sometimes I just get so frustrated. Just to have somebody to talk to, [to] tell me, 'Everybody feels that way,' that 'This is your role, don't worry,' I think is good." Thinking that beginning elementary teachers come to believe, from the comments of administrators and the public at large, that they are "second-rate" teachers because they teach in elementary schools, M-05 says:

> I have a saying that I give to each person that is assigned to me, and I've used it for years, and it says, "I am a teacher. I am someBODY." . . . and so I've always given them this saying, "I am a teacher. I am someBODY," and just keep building that up.

M-05 also believes that mentors serve beginners by helping them to establish reasonable boundaries to the influence that they can expect to have on their pupils. She observes:

> I think new teachers need to be encouraged and helped to understand that we can't save the world and we can't change all children. We have to do the best that we can with them within the time frame that we have and then send them back into their world.

Participants identify two key features of the mentor's role as supporter and encourager: (1) the official and public designation of the mentor as someone to whom the beginner can turn, and (2) the shared understanding between beginner and mentor that there are no "stupid" questions or issues to be avoided. With respect to the first of these features, M-03 feels that a mentor serves a beginner by being "the person you [the beginner] talk to, instead of wandering around, [wondering] 'Who should I ask?' Knowing that there's a designated person to ask." B-06 finds reassurance in the fact that her mentor is the one person among the teachers in her school--each of whom is friendly, <u>but</u> very busy--who considers helping her "part of her job, and something that she wants to do, to take her time to [do]." Similarly, M-07 believes that the identification of an experienced teacher as a beginner's mentor prevents the beginner from feeling guilty about turning to the mentor for help and advice. M-07 comments:

> For the beginning [teacher] also, it [a mentoring program] gives them a sense of stability to know that they HAVE somebody that they can call upon, [that] there is somebody there whose, quote, "job," [whose] decision [is] to help them. . . . You don't feel like you're honing [<u>sic</u>] in on this other person. You feel like, hey, you know, they are called my mentor, and we've sat down and talked already.

> They've assured me that they're there for me. I can come to them.

Besides being designated as the person to whom the beginner can turn for support, the mentor is also the officially-appointed person to whom the beginner can direct "stupid" questions without fear of reprisal. M-04 depicts the mentor as somebody that the beginner "can come talk to . . . who isn't going to put her down." Likewise, M-02 contends that an important benefit of a mentoring program for the beginning teacher is to "know that there's somebody that that person can turn to, and that they're not going to be made fun of, for not knowing how things work." In B-08's view, the mentor is someone to whom she can direct questions she might be embarrassed to ask somebody else, such as "Where are the pencils? Do we have paper clips? Which bathroom do I use?" B-11 compares an effective mentor to a Rogerian psychoanalyst or counselor when she comments: "I think a mentor can serve as some sense of relief for the other [beginning] teacher. They know there's somebody they can go ask in kind of an unconditional relationship. They're not going to say, 'Well, you idiot.'"

The emphasis which many participants place on a mentoring relationship which fosters an environment in which there are no embarrassing or stupid questions, and in which the beginner does not fear to be criticized for asking such questions, is related to their separation of the mentor's support function from any kind of evaluative feedback. (As a matter of fact, only two participants voice the opinion that a mentor is an appropriate person to evaluate the beginner. B-07 cites the fact that the mentor typically sees the beginner at work more often than anyone else, and B-15 would welcome her mentor's input as a <u>portion</u> her formal evaluation.) B-10 expresses the thinking of many participants on mentors' not assessing the work of their beginners. She says:

> I think that [mentors' not being involved in evaluation] would be important, because you would not feel open to go ask them questions. You would tend to keep things to yourself because you wouldn't want to appear stupid. And you would feel that if you went ahead to ask a stupid question, they're going to go, "Ah-ha! Let's mark her down on that. She didn't understand this." So it should be open, where you can ask as many questions [as you'd like], whether they're stupid questions or not.

B-01 makes a similar point when she comments, "I don't think you [a beginner] would want to tell your [mentor as] evaluator, 'I just totally fouled this all up.'" B-15 and M-10 also emphasize that beginners are more likely to go to their mentor rather than to an administrator--especially for minor problems--if their mentor is <u>not</u> involved with the beginner's formal assessment.

M-02 and B-04 believe that beginners would tend to "buy into" a mentor's suggestions and ideas if the mentor were also responsible for the beginner's summative evaluation. "I think a lot of [beginning] teachers would immediately start trying to say

what they thought the mentor wanted them to say," observes B-04, "as opposed to really relying on their own knowledge about what they need to be doing in the classroom."

Some participants who are mentors state directly that they would not serve as mentors if it involved evaluation. For example, M-07 says, "I would never be part of evaluation or assessment. . . . I feel the mentor is there to keep them [beginners] from getting a bad evaluation, keep them from developing some of these problems." Reflecting on the role of mentor as evaluator, M-05 comments, "I don't think a good mentor would WANT to be in on the assessment. Because assessment puts you on a different side of the coin and you have to start looking for things formally." M-01 notes:

> It would be hard for me, after I'd been helping someone, [to] step back and say, 'Well, she's doing a good job or she's not doing a good job.' And I think that should be left to somebody that is more involved in that sort of thing.

M-09 points to yet another difficulty of evaluation for the mentor, a difference in approach to teaching:

> I would NEVER want to assess her [the beginner's] work because she and I just don't approach things [the same way]. We got along real well, but she had her way of teaching and I have mine, and I don't like people comparing us. I don't think that's fair to her.

In fact, M-09 believes that the basic purpose for mentoring programs is undermined if mentors evaluate their beginners. She comments:

> I think that the value of mentoring would diminish because the new teacher would feel like she couldn't really be herself and ask the questions that she needed [to ask]. Sometimes you feel like you shouldn't ask that question, [and that] you need to really dig and search and find that answer, and it may take you two weeks, but rather than showing your vulnerability to someone, you're going to do it yourself, and I think that that negates what the mentor should be doing.

<u>Fitting in.</u>

Besides serving as a source of support and encouragement, helping the beginner to fit into the school setting is frequently cited by participants as a major role of the mentor. For instance, B-04 comments that "There's so many little details when you're a first year teacher, as far as how the school operates, that the other teachers are real familiar with, but to you everything is new." B-02, an elementary school librarian, believes that she needs to have "a building mentor as well as someone who is familiar with our library." Mentors voice similar sentiments. For example, M-02 suggests that the

> first thing that a new teacher has to have is help with just the way the school runs. Who do you go see when you have a problem? Where do you get books, desks, etc.? How do you fill out forms that have to be filled out? Where do you go

> for assemblies? Just the logistics of the situation, that's really important.

Furthermore, M-02 notes that just knowing where to go and how to attend to administrative tasks is critical knowledge for the beginner:

> Honestly--and this maybe sounds really terrible--but for a beginning teacher the main thing to worry about probably for the first three months is just how to get around the school and how to take care of the day-to-day business that's so automatic for the rest of us. And then, you can be kind of worried about teaching.

The participants give numerous examples of the "details" that beginners need to know and which mentors can help them to learn. For instance, B-07 reports on the problem of not learning the location of Scantron machine in her building until after the first grade report was completed, and B-14 describes her frustrations in organizing a field trip. Other examples provided by the participants include: payroll procedures (M-05); location of closets, materials, workbooks, and construction paper, and ordering procedures (B-06); cumulative files (M-09); closing bulletins and lists of senior activities (B-07); scoring reading magazine tests (B-12); and understanding school and school system jargon and acronyms (M-11).

Help in dealing with "paper work" is cited as an essential and sometimes the <u>most</u> essential role played by the mentor. M-05 believes that "probably the most effective way to be a good mentor is to make sure that new teachers do not get bogged down in paper work," and that mentors need to teach beginners "how to do it without [paper work] becoming overpowering to them." Believing that "You can't learn record keeping in college because that's so individualized by building and school system," M-13 suggests that "a valuable reason for the mentor" is the time spent sitting down with beginners to teach them record keeping skills. Finally, asked what is the most critical feature of a mentoring program, M-05 responds:

> I would say probably that helping them [beginners] to deal with the massive amount of paper work would be number one. Because if they can do that, most people can stay in teaching. In my experience, most people who have burned out in teaching have just thrown up their hands at what they consider [to be] the administrative paper work which comes down the pike to the teacher.

While in most cases paper work is associated with record keeping, beginners and mentors in vocational fields also associate it with broader concerns. B-10 observes that "with the good mentorship you would benefit, paper work-wise, especially with the funding and grants and things like that. You need somebody that has done that before."

Many participants believe that the mentor's role in helping beginners to become acclimated to the workplace goes beyond "details," "paper work," and "record keeping" to making them "feel at home" in their schools--although only one participant,

M-10, also suggests that the mentor might help the beginner to fit into the community in which the school is located. The importance of the mentor's function in helping the beginner to feel comfortable in a school is evident in B-03's reflection on how mentoring programs can benefit beginners:

> For the beginner, I think, the important part would be easing you into the situation. You leave--at least in my case and in [the case of] most beginning teachers--that group you were in at the college. You have friends and you have a support system and all of a sudden you're in a strange school with strange students sometimes, and a mentor is that one connection that you have in the faculty that you believe is concerned with you, that you can go to.

M-12 makes a similar observation:

> For the beginner, I hope that it [a mentoring program] makes them feel more comfortable in the school environment. They know if they have a problem, there's someone they can go to. They don't feel isolated. This is probably the biggest benefit, just to make them feel more comfortable in their new working environment.

Participants associate the process of becoming comfortable in a new working environment with the knowledge of explicit and implicit "policies," "procedures," "traditions," and "school politics." For instance, M-04 recalls discussing with her beginner how to decorate her classroom during the Christmas holiday season without offending the Jewish children in the class--and "before she finds that out by making some mistake or stepping on somebody's toes." B-14 admits to having mistakenly presented the "Student of the Year" award and another award recognizing outstanding academic progress to the same student. She says, "We had no idea that this "Student of the Year" shouldn't even have been in included in that [other award]. We didn't know that. So one of our children got cheated out of an award, and it was just because we didn't know." On the other hand, B-10--who wishes that somebody could "Write down all the little traditions that go on in a school system, like 'Jock of the Year'"--relates how her mentor's advice prevented her from making a decision at odds with an unwritten policy of her school district:

> I was planning . . . we were combining the FFA [Future Farmers of America] and FHA [Future Homemakers of America], and we were having a social. It was around Halloween, and we had games and a pumpkin decorating contest, and then we were going to have like 30 minutes extra, and I wanted to just have a stereo system and let them dance [but] he [her mentor] informed me that the school board would absolutely flip if we let them dance for 30 minutes.

Accessibility

Time.

Among the participants, effectiveness of mentoring is consistently linked to the mentor's accessibility in terms time and proximity. There is more agreement on the need for mentors

and beginners to spend time together than on any other feature of mentoring programs. The only instance of a participant not ranking shared time as an important factor is B-06, a re-entering teacher, who says, "In my case, I wouldn't feel a need to do that [spend her conference hour and/or lunch period with her mentor]." But she also adds, "For a beginning teacher, I mean, a newly beginning teacher, that would probably be very helpful." However, in general, most participants--mentors and beginners alike--view time spent between mentor and beginner as very important. For example, M-13 says:

> I'd say [the] number one [feature of an effective mentoring program is] release time from my class, to spend with this other teacher. Because in my opinion the number one priority of this job is availability, and I like to make myself available on the casual, spur of the moment instances. Because in your work, you don't always know ahead when you're going to need to ask a question.

M-06 suggests another important element of shared time: regularity. She calls for "a designated time where the mentor and the person that they are being a mentor for could get together <u>on a designated regular basis</u> and [be] given time to do that [emphasis added]." M-11 also calls for "blocks of time," 50 or 60 minutes in length, that the mentor and beginner can spend together, rather than just a few minutes here and there.

Participants who are beginners make similar observations. "I think it would be terribly frustrating in a high school were you never could see the person," comments B-01. B-08 says:

> I don't think you could have an effective mentorship program if you didn't have proximity and free time, those release times at the same time, because odds are both of you have a family. You know, a first year teacher's going to be working 'til midnight anyway. She doesn't have time to take after-hour hours to do that [meet with her mentor].

B-15, who regrets not having had "a regular time period set aside weekly for meeting with my mentor," suggests that inability to spend time with a mentor may be even more difficult for beginners coming from a good student teaching experience. She comments:

> I had come from a student teaching situation where I was having a lot of daily contact with my supervising teacher, and to go from one extreme to the other is fairly drastic. Not that I couldn't handle it, but I felt like I was probably less secure by not having a convenient opportunity to get the feedback that I was looking for, or just [to get] questions answered--"What ideas do you have for disciplining this student?"--that kind of thing.

Interestingly, only B-06, among all the participants, links the work experience of prospective mentors with having the time to work with beginners. She says, "I think three or so years of teaching under your belt would be, is, important, so that they have the job down well enough that they've got the time to do these extra things."

The participants cite numerous examples of how the time

between beginners and mentors is used, and where it is found. In some cases, the time is simply "some time to sit down to talk" (M-07). B-07 reports that it would have been helpful for her to have meetings with her mentor. B-03 also says that beginners and mentors need to meet before the beginning of the semester:

> It might be better if mentors and their mentees got together for a week or two before. I mean, it's almost [as] though you meet each other the day before school starts and they [mentors] are necessarily too busy to take care of you, I understand that.

M-07 also emphasizes that there must be this unstructured time for the beginner and mentor to get to know one another before the mentor considers "going into the classroom and observing, because you have to have that relationship."

Another type of time spent by mentors and beginners is planning time. Time for planning can come before the school year or semester begins. At this time, M-11 notes, "the mentor and beginning teacher can get together to do such things as figure out how to set up a room." Time for planning can also come during the school day while the beginner and mentor plan class activities together, or while the beginner consults the mentor.

In addition to time spent just talking or in planning, the participants often refer to time spent in the classroom of one's partner. For instance, M-07 believes that providing mentors with a chance to meet with and observe beginners is the most critical feature of an effective mentoring program. She says, "I would like to see some formalized time set aside [to meet with a beginner]. I'd also like to have some time to go in the room and actually observe the teacher teaching, which I've never been really given." M-03 points to a mentor's need for time to analyze observation notes and to meet with the beginner in a post-observation conference. "I need another hour to convert those tallies to some type of summary," she notes, "and then probably another hour to talk to her with the things I've observed." Some participants also emphasize a need for beginners to spend time observing their mentors (e.g., M-03) or, working with their mentor (M-11). B-08 notes that seeing a mentor in actual working situations is valuable for the beginner, but that this visibility also puts the mentor into a vulnerable position:

> The beginning teacher can see this. Some kid belts her [the mentor] one and she rolls with the punches, literally, or the principal chews her out for something, or a parent is irate, and that's where proximity is real important, too, because you can just see those things. Of course, it leaves the mentor teacher wide open for feeling like Zeus on the mountain.

Having or finding the time to make classroom visits, and to engage in related activities, such as post-observation conferences, is an issue raised by several participants. Primarily, the problem is framed with reference to the provision of released time from regularly assigned duties. M-03 argues that the school system must "provide release time for the mentor

teacher and or the beginning teacher both. The state wants the mentor to observe in the classroom, fine. When do you expect us to do it?" However, one participant also suggests that absence from the classroom to observe a beginner, even if a substitute is provided, may not be desirable for all mentors. "My class comes first," M-14 says, "and I was concerned about my class and I hate to have a substitute in there. But there are some times that you have to be out."

The participants describe several different times during and outside of the school day when they meet with their partners. They often mention meeting during shared conference hours or lunch periods. For example, M-03 reports the value of meeting with her beginner during their shared conference hour:

> My beginning teacher and I--it was just an accident, it was not arranged--we did have the same conference hour, which was wonderful, and I've often wondered how we could have done what little we did get done if we didn't have that mutual conference hour.

However, B-03 indicates that meeting with a mentor during a conference hour may not always be a good choice. She points to the importance of that time for the mentor's and beginner's own work:

> It would be nice if they [the administration] could give time, somehow, so mentors could meet with [beginners] off the other's schedule, because you can't expect them to give up their conference hour. So I have found how valuable conference hours can be. That hour a day is the only time to do everything and so I can see that they wouldn't want to give it up.

B-11 also notes that some teachers prefer not to give up any of their time, at least not without an incentive. She says:

> I've found teachers to be very selfish of their time. They don't, as a whole, like to stay after [school] or do more than they have to, so how do you require a mentor to do that without . . . some sort of small reward?

Several participants mention common lunch periods as another opportunity for mentors and beginners to meet. This time is occasionally described as a desirable to meet, as when M-04 comments that "Rhonda and I have been fortunate [in] that we do share the same lunch period and talk openly about things." B-01, working in a small school, reports that "Our whole staff eats lunch at the same time, so we've got that, which is invaluable for getting anything." But some participants do not favor lunch as a time for beginners and mentors to meet. In the first place, many participants report that lunch periods are often very brief, sometimes shorter than 20 minutes. More importantly, they suggest that the lunch period is the only time during the day that teachers can relax a little. M-03 comments that lunch was the time that her beginner "got to really relax and forget about school for a brief time," and M-08 says that she and her beginner "did have lunch together, but that's not a good time to discuss anything. Everybody's trying to find a break away from

everything." B-03 offers insight into yet another subtle barrier to a beginner's feeling comfortable about meeting with a mentor during a lunch period. She says:

> Lunch hour is only 25 minutes for teachers. You don't have a lot of time but that's the only time I see my mentor and we do talk on lunch hour. . . . We just happen to eat in the same place most of the time, and of course I didn't find that out until the second semester because I ate up here in the work room and then I wandered down to the cafeteria. That's scary for beginners, by the way, to wander into the cafeteria. I mean, you've never been down there and there's this little group that's been together for years, and there you are. So I just went down there and there I was.

The comments of many participants indicate that meeting the various times demands involved in mentoring is related to features of the structure of schools which are largely inflexible. Occasionally they report that some time is <u>made</u> available to them for mentoring activities. For example, M-13 says, "I try to be available at any time, but I would like to have some release time when I could work with this [beginning] teacher. And my experience has been that all I have to do is mention this and I am given that time." Similarly, M-14 indicates that she is provided with time to engage in peer coaching with her beginner:

> When we did our peer coaching we were given a half day and I went in and observed her. Then we had a thirty minute time block that [<u>sic</u>] the two of us conferred. They provided us with that. We did that type of peer coaching two or three times a year.

B-13 describes arrangements being made which allowed her to observe a librarian in another school, both in the library and in the classroom. She says, "I observed her teach four classes, and that was very beneficial. We came away with some ideas for management of a class of students in the library, and some lesson plan ideas that I thought were good."

Participants describe meeting times for beginners and mentors during the day as occurring much more because of chance than because of intentional arrangement. This is true, for example, with respect to shared conference hours or lunch periods. The participants working in elementary schools point to other times when, by chance, beginners and mentors can be together. For example, M-01 describes meeting with her beginner during recess: "A lot of times we would see each other out on the playground at recess time, 10 or 15 minutes. You'd be out there and you could [ask], 'Well, how's it going? You having any problems?' This sort of thing." Other times that beginners and mentors can get together include those times when specialists in Physical Education, Music, or Art take over classes (e.g., M-05, M-09). A few participants (e.g., B-02, M-09) report that in some schools beginners and mentors are able to meet during 30 minutes before and after the students' school day when teachers are <u>required</u> to be in a school.

In contrast, many participants describe ways in which the structure of schools and of the school day prevents or greatly restricts the time when mentors and beginners can interact. For example, B-14 says, "With her [B-14's beginner] teaching 6th grade and me with Kindergarten, we had absolutely no time, ever. I never saw her during a free time in the building."

Among the participants who work in high schools, structural impediments are frequently cited which prevent beginners and mentors from meeting together. For example, commenting on the trying to arrange beginners' and mentors' work schedules so that they share the same conference hour, M-02 says, "It would be next to impossible to schedule them that way. It's a good idea in theory; in practice it would never work. There's just no way that we could every work it out." B-10 notes that she was unable to meet with her mentor during the day because he taught in an entirely separate building on the school grounds and also because he made home visits during his conference hour. B-11, a Vocational Home Economics teacher, points out the need for her (or her mentor) to go on grocery shopping trips during their conference hour. B-07 reports that her mentor was frequently out of the building in the afternoon, and that various music competitions would often involve her and her mentor after school until as late as eight o'clock at night. M-02 mentions the need to schedule "singleton" classes [i.e., the only section of a course to be offered] as contributing significantly to the problem of assigning beginners and mentors to common conference hours or lunch periods. Finally, B-15 believes that the fact mentor's responsibilities as a department chairperson limited the opportunities for her and her mentor to get together. She says:

> In terms of putting in the extra time, especially, because I think that was a problem in my case. My mentor was department chairman. She had numerous other responsibilities, in addition to being my mentor, and she basically just ran out of time, I think, or ran short on time.

Participants suggest that beginners and mentors often must scramble to meet with one another. For example, M-14 reports that most of the time she worked with beginners occurred after school, and M-08 says that her beginner "would come in before school and grab me." B-07 admits that she and her mentor were forced to "catch each other on the run," and B-10 says that she met with her mentor while attending meetings after school when "we were supposed to be doing things besides mentoring."

<u>Proximity.</u>

Closely related to the participants' remarks about time shared between beginners and mentors are their comments about the physical proximity of beginning and mentor. Some participants do not consider proximity as a critical feature of mentoring programs. B-09 points out, for example, that many elementary schools are so small that the physical distance between mentors and beginners is manageable. M-03 considers other factors, like a personality match between beginner and mentor, as much more

important than proximity. B-01 remarks that, except in huge high schools, distance is not a problem. She says, "I think you could take a few extra steps and go out of your way."

By and large, participants view shared time as being more important than proximity. For example, B-09 comments:

> I think if you had those common times, like a lunch hour or a conference hour . . . that would take care of that need [for the beginner to have contact with the mentor]. . . . I don't think you have to be teaching next door to each other to have a successful program.

Location becomes an increasingly important factor as the amount of common time shared by beginner and mentor diminishes, as M-01 notes:

> If you had the time you could meet, the proximity of the rooms wouldn't matter that much. But if you couldn't get a time to meet, then I think being close to each other, where you could maybe see each other either first thing in the morning or last of the day or something like that, would be fine. If you couldn't have the times, then the locations would be good.

However, other participants consider proximity as a relatively important feature of good mentoring programs. B-07 says that the nearness of her mentor in a room directly above her "was the only thing that saved us." M-13 says, "It would be extremely difficult for me to be of any help to someone out on the other wing." In the view of B-03, physical proximity is the most important feature of an effective mentoring program. She notes:

> First, I think . . . he or she [the mentor] should be physically close. My mentor is all the way over there, so he's not been in my room once. Mainly because we're busy and so he doesn't have time to truck around and neither do I, so I haven't seen him much.

Some participants, like M-06, look for a combination of shared time and physical proximity. She says, "It's kind of a combination of [being] given some regular time and being close by . . . that accessibility to get to you when you have a problem."

In general, many participants emphasize the importance of proximity for the beginner in getting quick answers to questions and ready advice for dealing with pressing classroom situations. "There are lots of times [while] teaching [in] elementary school, where things come up [at the] last minute and you need an answer immediately, right now," observes B-06. M-07 believes that such immediate accessibility is very important. She comments:

> There just needs to be somebody who's going to be around where they can grab that person and say, "Hey, by the way, such and such happened. What can I do? What should I have done? Is there something I can change quickly now before my decision is set in cement?" . . . They really need somebody close by, somebody within hands' reach that they can grab for.

M-03 points out that even a short delay of thirty minutes in

providing the beginner with information or advice can be costly. Similarly, M-06 notes that immediate assistance is often crucial:

> Whether it would be [in] teaching or counseling . . . your mentor would be someone who was close by . . . so that when you have problems you don't have to wait 'til the next day, that you can get some help and assistance immediately. Because in a classroom situation so often times you need, if Johnny's misbehaving and [you ask] "What can I do about it? What's worked?"--it's not going to help if it's two days down the road.

M-12 and B-11 suggest that locating beginners near mentors is important for yet another reason. M-12 predicts that the concern for safety in the classrooms of some schools requires that beginners be located very near to their mentors in order to minimize the time that they spend out of their classrooms. B-11 makes a similar case for schools in which classroom discipline may be a great concern.

Among the participants, only M-10 and M-03 suggest that there may be a <u>disadvantage</u> in locating beginners very near to their mentors. In such a situation, M-10 observes that the beginner and the mentor "could get on each other's nerves, like husband and wife. At each other's throat." On the other hand, M-03 says that beginners may feel uncomfortable and under scrutiny if their classrooms are located very near to their mentors' classrooms. She says:

> You want to give her [the beginner] some space. . . . You don't want her to feel like that mentor is watching every move she makes. She's got to have a little freedom of her own. . . . I could see where they wouldn't want to feel like they were being watched every single second, or that we hear through the walls, or to think, "Every time my class gets a little loud, they're hearing it."

As with the feature of shared time, participants stress that the physical proximity of beginner and mentor is related to the physical structure and organization of schools. Participants working in elementary schools point out that classroom locations are generally determined by grade. As M-08 suggests, significant differences in the grade taught by the beginner and the grade taught by the mentor can also affect their proximity to one another. She says, "I hardly ever see the upper grade people because they're at the other end of the building. Had she [M-08's beginner] been an upper grade person . . . our schedules would not ever have crossed one another." (M-04, separated from her beginner by a flight of stairs, reports that she sometimes communicates with her beginner by means of notes carried by a student who moves between the two classrooms for accelerated work.) M-14 also admits that "moving" classrooms so that a beginner and a mentor might be near one another would be a difficult task and "no small process" because of "the tons of little bitty things you have to move." Likewise, participants working in secondary schools indicate that the classroom location of teachers is typically based on department or content area.

However, this is not always the case, since M-02 points out that the department of which she is a member is located in two sections of the school building that are separated from each other by a considerable distance.

Some participants report situations in which mentors and beginners are actually isolated from one another. B-10, for example, notes that her mentor is located in a different building. B-2 and B-13, both school librarians, point out that an experienced elementary school librarian who serves as a mentor for a beginning elementary school librarian will usually work in a different school. The situation is even more drastic for M-06, a school counselor. She is assigned to two schools, and her beginner is assigned to three different schools. In these situations, direct contact between beginner and mentor is reported to be very minimal, and most of the contact that does exist is by means of school mail, telephone, or (in the case of B-13) electronic mail.

Conclusion

Throughout their interviews, most of the 15 beginners and 14 mentors who participated in this study clearly communicate how greatly they value effective mentoring programs for beginning teachers, school librarians, and school counselor. In general, they believe that effective mentoring programs are based on a few, key principles--that mentors are familiar with the grades or the content areas of the beginners with whom they work, that mentors are willing to provide support and encouragement readily, that mentors share with their beginners their practical knowledge of school and district policies and procedures, and that mentors are readily accessible to beginners. It is also clear that the participants perceive that the greatest obstacles to effective mentoring programs often lie within the structure and organization of school, especially in terms of how readily beginners and mentors can spend time together, in conversation or in each other's working environment. However, with the exception of two mentors (one had recently completed a university course in the mentoring of beginning teacher; the other had served for several years as a mentor in a highly structured and well-financed mentoring program in another state), participants make little reference (without prompting) to other features of mentoring programs discussed in the literature, including mentor training, financial incentives for mentors, the role of mentor as instructional and curriculum expert, and the potential benefits of mentoring programs for students in the classes of beginners.

For the majority of participants, a formal mentoring program is a relatively new idea, and their ideas about it are just beginning to take shape. The interviews present many indications that these beginners and mentors are part of mentoring programs that are in very early stages of development. B-15, for instance, reports that her mentoring experience "didn't have much in terms of a formal, structured program. It was so informal, so

loose, that it was barely functioning." Many of the mentors admit that they are very uncertain about what it means to be a mentor, and what their roles and responsibilities are. "I didn't really know what was expected of me," says M-01. Consequently, the participants serving as mentors frequently express a need for some kind of guidance, through limited training or by means of brief, published guidelines, to clarify--but not to control or to specify narrowly--their roles and responsibilities as mentors. M-08 expresses the kind of frustration that many of the participants who are mentors feel:

> I really think they should've hauled us all in and said, "If you're going to be a mentor, let us sit down and talk to you about some things that might help or might not help." Because I felt very frustrated in the beginning, also, as I'm sure she [M-08's beginner] did, too. Or maybe get both sets of us in, bring in your partner with you to the meeting, and check up on us there. . . . And I think if it's going to work successfully, somebody needs to be in charge, or somebody needs to be saying, "Here's some things for you," even if they just send you some information through the mail or something about it.

Some participants who are beginners also express a confused understanding of the purposes and structure of the mentoring program of which they are part. For example, B-09 says:

> To be quite honest with you, I was unaware of this program. I was unaware of the fact that I was supposed to have a mentor this year. If I can really dig down deep and search my memory, I think at the very beginning of the year . . . he [B-09's principal] said, "Well, why don't you be her [B-09's] mentor, because you have done kind of the same thing." But she was a second year-teacher.

In any case, the participants in this study communicate a vision of mentoring programs--based largely on their own experiences and intuitions rather than on formal training in mentoring or other sources of information--which is largely in keeping with what is already known about effective mentoring programs.

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Table 1

School District Characteristics

	Characteristics					
District	Enrollment	Ele	JrHi	Hi	Teaching Staff	Average Salary[1]
Harrison	20,000-25,000	40-50	6-10	6-10	1,000-1,500	$28,000
Pierce	1,000-2,000	1-5	1-5	1-5	100-200	$25,000
Fillmore	< 1,000	1-5	0	1-5	< 50	$20,000

[1] Instructors, certified staff, and administrators

Table 2

Response rates

	Mentors				Beginners			
District	Total	Yes	No	No Response	Total	Yes	No	No Response
Harrison	54	11	22	21	64	12	12	40
Pierce	3	1	1	1	3	1	0	2
Fillmore	4	2	1	1	4	2	0	2

Table 3

Mentors--Selected Characteristics

	Characteristics					
Mentor	Sex[1]	Race[2]	Age range	School level	Teaching experience (in years)	School district
M-01	F	Wh	46-55	Ele	16-20	Fillmore
M-02	F	Wh	26-35	Sec	1-5	Harrison
M-03	F	Wh	26-35	Sec	11-15	Pierce
M-04	F	Wh	> 56	Ele	26-30	Harrison
M-05	F	Wh	46-55	Ele	31-35	Harrison
M-06	F	Wh	36-45	Ele Counselor	11-15	Harrison
M-07	F	Wh	36-45	Ele	21-25	Harrison
M-08	F	Wh	36-45	Ele	16-20	Harrison
M-09	F	Wh	46-55	Ele	11-15	Harrison
M-10	M	Wh	> 56	Sec	36-40	Fillmore
M-11	F	Wh	46-55	Ele	11-15	Harrison
M-12	F	Wh	36-45	Ele	16-20	Harrison
M-13	F	Wh	36-45	Ele	16-20	Harrison
M-14	F	Wh	36-45	Ele	21-25	Harrison

[1] F = Female M = Male [2] Wh = White

Table 4

Beginners--Selected Characteristics

	Characteristics					
Beginner	Sex[1]	Race[2]	Age range	School level	Teaching experience (in years)	School district
B-01	F	Wh	< 26	Sec	1-5	Harrison
B-02	F	Wh	36-45	Ele librarian	0	Pierce
B-03	F	Wh	36-45	Sec	0	Harrison
B-04	F	Wh	46-55	Ele	0	Harrison
B-05	F	As	36-45	Sec	6-10	Harrison
B-06	F	Wh	36-45	Ele	unknown	Harrison
B-07	F	Wh	26-35	Sec	0	Harrison
B-08	F	Wh	36-45	Jr Hi	0	Harrison
B-09	F	Wh	36-45	Ele	1-5	Harrison
B-10	F	Wh	26-35	Sec	0	Fillmore
B-11	F	Wh	26-35	Sec	1-5	Harrison
B-12	F	Wh	26-35	Ele	0	Harrison
B-13	F	Wh	36-45	Ele Librarian	0	Harrison
B-14	F	Wh	46-55	Ele	0	Fillmore
B-15	F	Wh	36-45	Sec	0	Harrison

[1] F = Female [2] Wh = White As = Asian

Table 5

Summary of Participant Characteristics

	Mentors	Beginners	Combined
Sex			
Female	13	15	28
Male	1	0	1
Race			
White	14	14	28
Asian	0	1	1
Age range			
< 26	0	1	1
26-35	2	4	6
36-45	6	8	14
46-55	4	2	6
> 56	2	0	2
School level			
Elementary	11	7	18
Junior Hi	0	1	1
Secondary	3	7	10

Table 5 (continued)

Summary of Participant Characteristics

	Mentors	Beginners	Combined
Teaching experience (in years)			
0	0	10	10
1-5	1	3	4
6-10	0	1	1
11-15	4	0	4
16-20	4	0	4
21-25	2	0	2
26-30	1	0	1
31-35	1	0	1
36-40	1	0	1
Cannot be determined	0	1	1
School district			
Harrison	11	12	23
Pierce	1	1	2
Fillmore	2	2	4